Unusual Themes in Fiction by Ethel Sidgwick and Fannie Hurst

Novel Dedicated to America

Also There is an American Automobile Manufacturer in Madam

MADAM. By Ethel Sidgwick. Published by Small, Maynard & Co.

SEEMINGLY every one in Ethel Sidgwick's latest novel is quite mad. The most extraordinary things happen and no one expresses any surprise. Then perfectly ordinary events occur and every one is shocked. Of course it may be the fault of the author in making them appear mad when they are really quite sane, for she keeps the reader leaping hurdles to the very last page in order to follow her bewildering lead.

At the end the readers are left utterly at a loss as to why the novel should have been dedicated to America. To be sure there is an American in it, Paish, an automobile manufacturer, who, it is supposed, may be called the god of the machine. But he is not especially American, and, so far as the tale is concerned, one doesn't see why he should have been American at all.

Hurdles are mentioned advisedly. The style is decidedly "jumpy." Not the orderly jumpiness of May Sinclair's latest experiments, nor yet the frantic leapings of James Joyce. The war had a queer effect on English novelists. Certainly it turned the staid old form of the novel topsy turvy. However the new form will crystallize, and though it shows no sign of settling yet, the experiments, like Madam, are most exciting.

Every one in the book may be quite mad but, except for poor Mousie, who is a trifle more mad than the others, every character knows his place and keeps in it. Mousie outrages conventions all around. He simply will not stay in his place. He is very clever about it too and changes his name so no one can place him. Not, it is gathered, that he is ashamed of being the son of a defunct but highly respectable family coachman and a very much alive and ultra pious mother, but because he didn't want to have people connecting him continually with the story of his five brothers who had been killed in the war. Also, perhaps, because a high sounding name like Lancaster would get him into drawing rooms where he wanted to have a bit of fun with the "toffs," while Lane would have meant the tradesmen's entrance.

Mousie has "ideas"—above his station in life, of course. It was suspected that he was really a Socialist. No one had ever seen him wearing a red tie, but the suspicion remained, just the same. In fact, it was proved in court later on, when he was accused of stealing a pair of earrings. But the tale of the five brothers got him off, in spite of the pamphlets that had been found in his room.

Sometimes the author openly makes fun of her creations. She even makes Titus, the horse, talk when no other characters are around to speak for her. Like Henry Wicken, she is always on the look-out for a story. Henry dashes through the book, keen on the scent of every trifling event, sure there is a story behind it. Then he takes his find and lays it at the feet of his friends and watches them eagerly while they turn it over, usually with a disdainful toe.

Erith is especially disdainful. She and Mousie are the length of the social scale apart, and it is the instinctive enmity between them which forms the basis of the plot. Erith had him arrested, though she knew he didn't steal the earrings—just because she hated him and the fact that he was "on the make." On his part, he loathed her pretensions and the fact that she was well over the top, on the down grade, and that she and her kind would forever obstruct all that he most wished for and worked for.

Perhaps, after all, there may be no mystery in the dedication. Paish, who recognizes Mousie's abilities, makes it possible for him to overstep the hard and fast bounds of caste by giving him a chance to finish his engineering education. He even makes it possible for Mousie to marry the little secretary lady who stood by him stanchly, for "Americans are so perfect, to women."

At all events, Madam is a book to read and reread.

Children's Books

Some Attractive Volumes for Boys and Girls

HOW SING FOUND THE WORLD IS ROUND. By Sydney Reid. Published by P. F. Volland Company.
BETTY, BOBBY AND BUBBLES. By Edith Mitchell. Published by P. F. Volland Company.
A LONDON SPARROW AND MIGNONETTE. Adapted by C. M. Duncan-Jones. Published by Macmillan Company.
BILLEE: THE STORY OF A LITTLE BOY AND A BIG BEAR. By Isabel Hawley Scott. Published by Revell.
QUEEN NATURE'S FAIRY HELPERS. By Alice Craig Edgerton. Published by Lloyd Adams Noble.

TWO attractive books for little people are Sydney Reid's How Sing Found the World Is Round and Edith Mitchell's Betty, Bobby and Bubbles. The stories themselves are good, and the way in which the books are made up is particularly suitable for little hands and bright eyes that like pictures. These two little books belong to the series called "Sunny Books for Children" and should have just as much attention as the more than a million other copies of Sunny Books who have gone out to children all over this country in the last few years.

Among old tales for little people are A London Sparrow and Mignonette, adapted by C. M. Duncan-Jones. A London Sparrow is particularly quaint and appealing. One of the baby sparrows in a nest in London tells the adventures of his family and himself. The conversation of the family makes the story more than usually good. Mignonette is a rather priggish little tale with a moral. Its purpose is to teach something of good nature and sweetness to its small readers.

A little lame boy named Angelo and a big tame bear named Billee share honors in Isabel Hawley Scott's Billee. Little Angelo is living in the poorhouse when the story opens and joins an Italian who is traveling about with a dancing bear, principally because he is attracted by the animal. Life with the Italian proves not much more attractive than life in the poorhouse, but Angelo does not desert his four-footed friend. The hardships are too much for Billee, however, and he runs away. The chief interest lies in the reunion of Angelo and Billee farther along in the story. Things turn out very well for both of them, considering the hardships they endured together early in the book.

Endowing the forces of nature with fairy qualities, Alice Craig Edgerton manages to give a great deal of information in a manner aimed to entertain little people in Queen Nature's Fairy Helpers. There are questions at the end of each chapter which the little reader should be able to answer. They will give an idea of whether he has learned anything from the stories.

Arene Translated

Excellent English Version of French Classic

THE GOLDEN GOAT. Translated from the French of Paul Arene by Frances Wilson Huard. Published by George H. Doran Company.

PAUL ARENE has been placed beside Guy de Maupassant by no less a person than Anatole France, who says of this volume which Mrs. Huard has translated:

"I had never read a modern book which conveyed to me as much as did The Golden Goat, the idea of antique beauty, of Greek poetry in its first flower, its fresh newness."

The setting of the tale is in Provence, the author's own corner of France, and the flavor of the country pervades every page of the book. High up on a rock, quite apart from the other inhabitants of the province, live the descendants of Saracen pirates whose poverty is mitigated by the knowledge that somewhere in the village lies buried the thousand-year-old treasure of the King of Majorca, to which the golden goat may one day lead them. In the words of Skipper Ruf:

"It is that which makes them so proud—a golden goat that may be met at night browsing on the mountain moss. No one has ever been able to catch it; it runs so fast. But hope keeps people alive, although it does not fatten them; and if the Moresques, as they are called, are all thin it is because they have only lived on hope for a good long time."

Despite the skipper's scorn of his fellow Provinçals, the professor who tells the story determines to visit the village to pursue his studies. Having fallen asleep at the foot of the rock he is awakened by the tinkle of a bell and sees before him a goat with tawny fleece and hoofs that shone like diamonds. He tries to catch the goat, but she eludes him, dropping in her scramble through the bushes the little bell and an ivory bolt which fastened it to her collar, both inscribed with Arab characters.

With this tangible proof of the legend in his hand it is no wonder that the professor becomes interested in the search, and when he further learns that the secret of the treasure is in the possession of the beautiful daughter of his host, the Mayor, there is an added zest.

How he pursues his quest, in spite of the hostility of the townspeople, who have been set against him by his rival, both for the treasure and the girl, is told in a most delightful way. Then just as he has the secret within his reach he has to choose between the treasure and Mlle. Norette. Which he chooses and what comes of his choice it would not be fair to tell. It is sufficient to say that the reader will be satisfied.

Mrs. Huard is to be congratulated on her choice of author to be translated, and on her translation, which fulfills all that Anatole France said of the original. The delicate charm of the author's style is retained throughout the book.

FANNIE HURST, well-known short story writer, has written her first novel, Star-Dust (Harper's)

Fannie Hurst's First Novel

Star-Dust Cries Out Against the Chinese Shoes of Convention

STAR-DUST. By Fannie Hurst. Published by Harper & Bros.

IF THERE is one art that Fannie Hurst possesses above all else, it is an ability to depict misery. She almost specializes in misery. She has been doing it for years, and naturally she does it rather well.

Lilly Penny, heroine of Miss Hurst's first novel, is a thoroughly miserable person. She seems never so happy as when there is some excuse for a good cry. As Lilly figured it, she was the grape between her family, the vine, and her daughter, the wine. She had to be squeezed pretty dry to make the wine something more than one-half of 1 per cent, but she was an eager martyr.

"If I can't be Venus, then let me be the Venus that is nearest to her!"

That was the principle that carried Lilly Penny through life. Lilly gave up her family, her bridegroom-husband and the love nest on Page Avenue, St. Louis, for just a little pinch of star dust. And at that, when the final paragraph is written, it proves to be second-hand dust.

If a reader can hurdle the opening paragraph of the book there is considerable likelihood that he will go on and reach that fatal last line. But the opening is difficult. In it one learns that Lilly was the kind of person whose "young mind had a habit of transcending itself into some such illusory realm as this: Springtime seen lacily through a phantasmagoria of song. A very floral sward. Fountains that tossed up coloratura bubbles of sheerest aria and a sort of Greek frieze of youth attitudinized toward herself."

Fortunately, this pace is not maintained. Miss Hurst steps down and tells us in plain English about the St. Louis boarding house, about Lilly's parents, Lilly's beau, and eventually the wedding.

"With the sexlessness of a young tree," writes Miss Hurst, "Lilly, with all her rather puerile innocence left her, walked into her marriage like a blind Nydia, hands out and groping sensitively."

After three weeks of living with a man who carried a celluloid toothpick in his vest pocket and worked his temples when he ate beefstak, Lilly began to cry out against "this trap—marriage!" She confessed that she had "let the molasses lake of family sentiment" suck her in.

"I'd rather be on my own in a garret, Albert," she said. "It's kinder to tell you. We musn't get into this thing deeper. Nothing can change me. Don't try!"

From here on Miss Hurst, through Lilly, combats the Chinese shoes of convention, scorning the "inevitable mothers with little broody household ways." Lilly brings up her baby, Zoe, according to her own peculiar notions. When Zoe graduates from grade school her mother takes her aside to explain the mystery of the sexes. Zoe is an apt pupil.

"If me and Ethel kiss," hazards Zoe, "it isn't sex, but if me and Gerald kiss, it is."

Apparently Lilly's system works, for Zoe blooms into a young lady and fulfills all her mother's hopes and plans. And Lilly, resigned to her fate, goes back to St. Louis to take up the old life on Page Avenue.

There is much that is entertaining in Star-Dust, much that is mere advanced motherhood propaganda, and an occasional penetrating poke into the souls of real persons. Fannie Hurst will probably be better liked for her short stories, but she has—there are 458 pages to prove it—written a novel.

The Romance of Old New Orleans

Stories of Famous Creole Families Told by Grace King

CREOLE FAMILIES OF NEW ORLEANS. By Grace King. Published by the Macmillan Company.

THE history of New Orleans is inseparably bound up with the Creole families which founded the city and brought to it the ceremonious dignity of Spain combined with the wit and grace of France. New Orleans, as the name indicates, originally was a French settlement. In 1762 Louis XV arbitrarily handed it over to Spain, very much against the wishes of the inhabitants.

A revolt was organized by some of the leading citizens, and the first Spanish Governor was driven out. Ultimately, however, a powerful Spanish fleet took possession of the city and the leaders of the revolt were executed. A number of Spanish families arrived in New Orleans and, after the bitter memories of the revolt were softened, a certain amount of intermarriage took place between the old settlers and the newcomers. The city was restored to France under Napoleon, who ceded it to the United States.

The French and Spanish colonists of Louisiana were very different from the hardy English Puritans who landed at Plymouth. A large proportion of them were adventurers of noble rank and their pedigrees in some instances can be traced far back into the Middle Ages. New Orleans even boasts the legend of a royal romance. As the story goes, Charlotte, daughter of the Duke of Brunswick and wife of a dissolute Russian Czar, escaped from the court, where she was miserable, by means of a pretended death and sham funeral, and came to America, where she rejoined her faithful lover, the Chevalier d'Aubant. After telling this pretty story, the author is compelled to admit that there is no historical basis for it.

New Orleans, however, is also rich in flesh-and-blood heroes. There is Bernard de Marigny, the wealthy young heir of an old French family, whose name is synonymous with wit and daring and lavish hospitality and aristocratic tastes. The story of Marigny's wooing, as quoted by the author from another source, is characteristic of the man:

"Arriving at Pensacola, Marigny went to a ball, where his attention was attracted to the most beautiful woman in it. He expressed his admiration and asked her name. His informant thought proper to warn him: 'You will meet trouble.' 'That's what I like,' answered Marigny lightly, and at once engaged the young lady to dance and made himself agreeable to her the rest of the evening, to the exclusion of her other admirers.

"The next morning he received seven challenges. 'I cannot fight all at once,' he answered, 'but I will meet one every morning before breakfast, until all are satisfied.' His first opponent fell with a sword thrust through the body. The six others professed themselves satisfied and made their apologies: 'We see that you are a man of courage and honor.' Marigny obtained without further opposition the hand of the beautiful young lady."

Marigny's skill in dueling was proverbial. On one occasion he wounded an opponent in such a way as to make him walk with a pronounced bend forward. Fighting a second duel with the same man, he observed to his seconds: "This time I shall try to straighten him." He did succeed in wounding his adversary in exactly the same place, and as a result the latter lost his stoop and gained a bend backward that made him even more conspicuous than before.

Dramatic Stories

Richard Washburn Child Utilizes Darkness

THE VELVET BLACK. By Richard Washburn Child. Published by E. P. Dutton & Co.

IN THIS collection of short stories it would appear that Mr. Child loves darkness rather than light. Certainly he is a master of suspense when it comes to describe events that occur in the "velvet black." So realistic are his descriptions of darkness that one can positively feel it.

In most of these stories the crux of the situation comes in darkness and Mr. Child extracts every ounce of thrill out of the struggles that take place when "the night, the house, the velvet black, were noiseless." The characters, too, come from the darkness of the underworld and their primitive emotions flash across the pages as the guns flash red and silver splitting streaks, which rip through the velvet black.

The longest story in the book, "The Cracking Knee," is laid in China. The Orient fares as well at his hands as the underworld. There an Englishman, a conscientious objector, is locked in the dark with a degenerate coolie. At a sound, "into the plush heavy blackness before his aching, staring eyes sprang a picture of his imagination's own painting, the vivid details of thrust of pointed razor-edged steel through neatly parting flesh, into his heart or lungs, made his fingers clutch cautiously in the moments of pause as they crawled along the floor in front of him. His hands were moving as if exercising their own wills to find and seize the other knife which he had been told would be put there."

How the darkness worked its terrors on him and finally goaded him into using the knife despite his principles is told in a powerful way. If, however, it was designed as an object lesson to conscientious objectors, it failed of its purpose, for his sweetheart, bound and gagged was also in the dark cellar, and it is only by sheer good luck that he doesn't kill her.

Mr. Child can justly be called a brilliant writer of tense and dramatic short stories.

The Complete Hero

A Short Route to the Guarded Heights

THE GUARDED HEIGHTS. By Wadsworth Camp. Published by Doubleday, Page & Co.

WADSWORTH CAMP uncovers the complete hero in The Guarded Heights. He writes about a young man who, beginning as a stable boy, walks through life on tiptoe until he storms the guarded heights, a symbol of the exalted places held by wealth and social position.

On his march to fame the hero captains the Princeton football team, makes innumerable touchdowns against both Harvard and Yale, goes to war as a major and wins the Croix de Guerre, comes back and amasses a huge fortune on the well known Wall Street. The only setbacks, which occur at frequent intervals, come from the young lady whom he has decided to marry. But finally, in the shattering climax, he does.

Such an optimistic story, given out in entirely readable fashion, will certainly please a great many readers. And it will displease no one.

Filming the Jungle

A CABLEGRAM just received from Major A. Radcliffe Dugmore to his publishers, Doubleday, Page & Co., announces his safe arrival at Port Said, Egypt. Major Dugmore has undertaken an expedition to British East Africa with the purpose of securing the most complete and elaborate motion picture records of jungle life that have ever been attempted. The reputation which he won before the war as an artist and photographer of big game predicts his success in the gigantic undertaking. Accompanying Major Dugmore is Sir Charles Ross, the eminent British authority on tropical travel and diseases.

Major Dugmore also expects to write a book on the expedition and plans to obtain for illustrations many unusual photographs and sketches in color.

Poetry by the Benets

Volumes by Brothers Show High Achievements That Are Nearly Equal

HEAVENS AND EARTH. By Stephen Vincent Benét. Published by Henry Holt & Co.
MOONS OF GRANDEUR. By William Rose Benét. Published by George H. Doran Company.

IT IS an interesting task to try to define and distinguish those bright and adjoining stars, the brothers Benét. The family resemblance between them is striking. Their divergence is even more marked, and it increases with the years. Perhaps as suggestive a starting point as any is to say that Stephen Vincent, the younger, is Greek, and William Rose, the elder, is Roman—with all that the words imply.

The chance that Stephen Benét led his last volume with two poems concerning the immortal Helen gives an easy opportunity to test his Ægean quality. It is ravishingly authentic at its best. When the Centaurs run they cover the ground with true Homeric leaps and laughter. Very uneven is the quality of the "First Vision." Let us agree at once that there is writing in Stephen Benét's volume that simply does not come off; there is shown a distinctly evener level, a more consistent craftsmanship, steadier inspiration and a clearer self-criticism in his elder brother's work. But at its crest we are completely enthralled by the younger man's sweep of verse. The "Last Vision of Helen," for instance, includes the glowing Song of the City of Troy, that never falters to the end. Very strong wine is this whole poem for any one with a weakness for things Hellenic. Mr. Benét believes with his whole sole in that extraordinary age and people, believes it so intensely that he makes you believe it intensely, makes you read on more swiftly to find what came to the Golden Queen in Egypt when the Sphinx sang her last song.

Faith can move verses quite as well as mountains. Mr. Stephen Benét deserves the praise of being called Greek precisely because he does believe so limpidly and simply in the beauty and magic of life. In that morning of great art in Greece, those all too brief Phidian years, when the wonder of the visible world first broke upon the eyes of the greatest artists our earth has known, there was no possibility of hesitation, there was no haze of past doubts or debating self-consciousness. Even to us of to-day a glimpse at a fragment of marble carved by these immortal hands can bring back this old sense of breath-taking wonder. All too quickly this first bloom passed—to recur again and again, for moments, in the hearts and labor of men, young Stephen Vincent Benét, for instance.

We like much in this book: "The Retort Discourteous," "8:30 A. M. on 32nd Street," "The Etcher," "Expressions Near the End of Winter," "Come Back" and "The Song of Cold and Pain" which begins:

Colder than leopards' eyes the arc
Where all the freezing stars go round.
Black wind runs trotting to the dark.
Striking cold hoofs on the cold ground.

The array of those titles suggests how joyously Mr. Benét looks about and tastes in every quarter. We could quote indefinitely. There are the cheerful lines which every one might repeat now and then as old age creeps on:

For we are young—and youth is steel!
Hark! at our shattering trumpet-peal
The spaniel worlds slink in to heel!

The joke is that worlds really do come to heel if only one is sure they are going to! And we wish we could quote at length from "Flood-Tide," that seems to have a little more crest to its wave than any other piece in the book—a little Kiplingesque, immensely beautiful and true of picture and sense.

But we must give due to that excellent artist, Mr. William Rose Benét, who in his new book shows the growth of his years and combines youthful ardor with precision and a rare mastery of word. There are few writers of English to-day who can equal Mr. Benét's rich and varied vocabulary. Much of this volume relates tales of the Renaissance, and no color is wanting upon Mr. Benét's canvas to make those gorgeous years live again. Sometimes the lines are too crowded to flow easily into the mind. They are always vigorous and speaking.

We have a preference for Mr. Benét writing off his own bat—about a Zeppelin bomb in "The Silver Balloon," about "The Voyage" and "Menagerie." He believes in his Quattrocento, but his belief is too full of modern wisdom and the modern confusion and excitement to give the reader that graceful, rounded, bloody age completely. He does his contemporary people with a delicious humor that gives exactly the right crispness. If he took his Renaissance heroes with the same straightforwardness they would be true to themselves and incidentally better poetry.

If the poetry championship of the world is ever fought out by families no literary bet could be safer than to back the Benét brothers against all comers. It is certainly an extraordinary literary event to find two such brilliant poets as these, of such nearly equal achievement, issuing from the same house.

G. P.

AMONG NEXT WEEK'S REVIEWS

LIFE AND LETTERS. By J. C. Squire.
DAVID HUMMELL GREER. By Charles Lewis Slattery.
DEATH: ITS CAUSES AND PHENOMENA. By Hereward Carrington, Ph. D.
FRAGMENTS OF TRUTH. By Richard Ingalese and Isabella Ingalese.
TAWI TAWI. By Louis Dodge.
THE WRONG TWIN. By Harry Leon Wilson.
THE DIVINE ADVENTURE. By Theodore Maynard.
THE HALL AND THE GRANGE. By Archibald Marshall.